

(Washington DC) Yesterday, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested over 1000 undocumented workers along with nine former and current employees at IFCO, a manufacturer of wooden pallets, crates, and containers. These raids occurred in several locations across the country including a San Antonio plant. The arrested IFCO employees will be charged with conspiring to transport, harbor, and encourage and induce illegal aliens to reside in the United States for commercial advantage and private financial gain. Congressman Charlie Gonzalez issued the following statement in response to these raids:

“If you want to reduce the number of undocumented workers in America, you must remove the incentive for them to come here. It's simply a matter of supply and demand. And, enforcing tough employer sanctions against those that knowingly hire undocumented workers is the best path to achieving this goal. Moreover, how can we expect people coming into our country to respect our laws when our own citizens disregard those very same laws?

Therefore, these raids at IFCO send a strong message to employers who know they have illegal workers on their payroll. We need to enforce the laws we already have on the books if we are serious about solving the problem of undocumented workers. Empty rhetoric and grandstanding may win headlines, but it does not stop workers from entering the United States.

IFCO management should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. The evidence suggests that this goes beyond simply hiring undocumented workers. They may have been actively recruiting and transporting these workers from other countries. If true, this is an especially egregious yet not isolated example of flouting laws against employing undocumented workers. Moreover, it would be unfair to only punish the undocumented workers who will undoubtedly be returned to their countries.

The federal government has the responsibility to design and implement a system that will enable law abiding employers to quickly and efficiently check identification documents. Otherwise employers might live in fear that they are employing undocumented workers and will be subject to sanctions. We need to streamline how employers and the government determine the legal status of workers so we do not unfairly burden employers.

This nation needs immigration law reform that addresses securing our borders, penalizing but

providing for earned legalization for undocumented workers and their families, and stringent enforcement of employer sanctions for employers who circumvent our laws for financial gain."

--30--